

Message received during special screening at community center

ARTICLE TOOLS

SHARE THIS



This image released by 20th Century Fox shows Amandla Stenberg in a scene from "The Hate U Give." ERIKA DOSS/20TH CENTURY FOX

HAZLETON — Start with yourself and it will spread to others.

That's the message Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Executive Director Chad Lassiter shared with some 50 area students who attended a screening of "The Hate U Give" at Hazleton One Community Center Saturday.

The community center served as a forum for students to share their thoughts on the film, which tells the story of a teenager who witnesses the shooting of a young African American by a white police officer. Its themes include racism, bias, hope and aspiration.

"At the end of the day, what I was hoping to accomplish is to just look at a film where we may see ourselves in that film," Lassiter said while sitting in a large circle with the group.

Lassiter asked the viewers to consider "how we see ourselves" and reminded them that no matter their background, they all are resilient.

"Seeing the humanity in ourselves allows us to see the humanity in others," he said.

Along with asking viewers for their thoughts on the film, Lassiter asked the students to share their experiences, if they've had encounters with law enforcement, as well as what they think it means for people to be "brave" and the characteristics and experiences that "makes us us."

Saturday's session is the first in what Lassiter hopes will become a series of events that he can organize with the help of community center representatives Elaine and Bob Curry.

"I just feel so enriched by coming to Hazleton today," Lassiter said. "I'm opening up a little bit of the work that I do. I think this film is the starting point for so many things I want to do with Elaine Curry and Bob Curry."

Bob Curry said he's pleased with the relationship that the community center developed with Lassiter and the commission, which discussed Pennsylvania's school funding formula during a meeting held in April.

The commission came to Hazleton after a video appeared on social media in February about an incident in the Hazleton Area High School cafeteria in which a school police officer punched a student in the leg and pressed her head to a table. Its advisory committee began meeting locally a year earlier.

"They had a public meeting here several months ago," Bob Curry said. "That's how we got to know Mr. Lassiter. He proposed coming here understanding we had such swift demographic changes in the area and understanding also the kinds of tension that often produces. He asked if we felt that it would be helpful for some of our students view the movie ... and we jumped at the prospect."

He said he was pleased with how engaged the students were during the discussion following the screening.

"Events like this can have a lasting positive impact," Bob Curry said. "We intend to do several more."

Contact the writer:

sgalski@standardspeaker.com; 570-501-3586